Depot Town Rag

December 2009

Look at all the people, gather'd 'round the depots

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

Volume 22, Number 10

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Mid-West High-Speed Rail System proposed

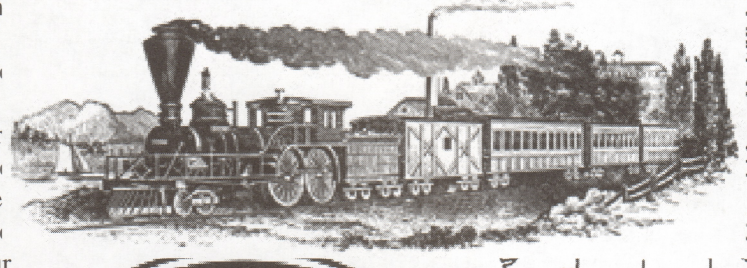
Governor Jennifer Granholm came through Depot Town a second time last summer. When she was here in April, she brough a $1/2 millon check to help fix up Ypsi' historic Freighthouse but, when she cam in August, she didn't even stop.

On August 24, the day after the 2009 Her itage Festival, Granholm only waved as sh passed through on the Amtrak passenge line. Boarding the train in Dearborn, th Guv was bound for Chicago—a six-hour train trip. Granholm says, if she can convince the feds, an $800+ million Mid-West High Speed Rail System could make the same trip in four hours.

Not only does the rough track bed slow today's trains, but at the same time, the feds are considering cutting back subsidies for existing rail service while highway and airport subsidies continue to grow.

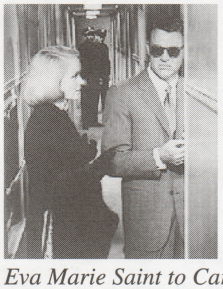
Up and down the MichiganCentral

Detroit to Chicago 1846-1901

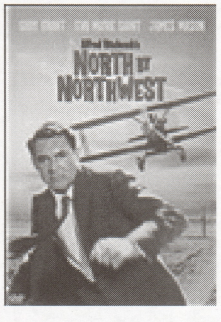


MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD

Ypsi had bit part in Hitchcock flic



Ypsilantians still thrill to hearing their town's name announced from the public address system at Chicago's train depot in Alfred Hitchcock's classic suspense film, North By Northwest



Eva Marie Saint to Cary Grant: "We'll get off the train when we get to Ypsi. Nobody will recognize you there."

Some Ypsi fans were confused by the order of things in Hitchcock's filming of Cary Grant being pursued by Evil Doers when Grant and Eva Marie Saint escaped on the train from Chicago toward Detroit. After so many historical views of the MCRR moving west, it was difficult to imagine anyone going east. But, hey! They might be just like those folks who will be travelling from Ann Arbor to Detroit once SEMCOG's Regional Transit Project gets under way next year.

Up-coming issues of *The Rag* will feature a series of essays to get Depot Towners ready for the return of rail travel to and from this old district alongside the railroad tracks.

All aboard the Central line

The loudspeaker announcement in Alfred Hitchcock's 1959 film *North By Northwest* calls off the towns in stentorian tones: "All aboard the Michigan Central Railroad for Niles, Buchanan, Battle Creek, Jackson, Ann Arbor, YPSILANTI, Dearborn, and Detroit."

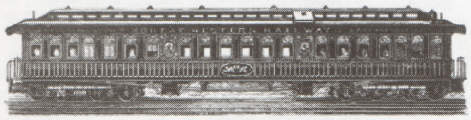
Ypsilanti folks still thrill to hearing their town's name shouted in the background of this classic Academy Award-nominated film.

Getting on and off the train is an emotional issue at Ypsi's depot. In big cities, train travelers arrive at the depot by taxi. In Detroit's heyday, they came to the MCRR depot two miles from downtown by Tiger Stadium via streetcars; there was an employee parking lot, but no lot for passenger parking. Midwesterners like to drive their autos to the depot and find a big parking lot nearby, but Depot Town's interests go far beyond parking issues.

Passenger and freight trains bring both good news and bad. Along with happy reunions, we've seen orphan trains pass through, and we see bodies arrive in coffins. Lots of tears are shed at depots and goodbyes can be heartbreaking. Soldiers left from this point for too many wars and too many are only remembered here on Memorial Day. Depots are such repositories of emotion that sometimes we even cry for the depots themselves.

ANN ARBOR 1839

Ann Arbor's Richardsonian Romanesque depot is now the Gandy Dancer restaurant where diners wildly applaud passing trains which now stop at a new depot one block west.



Private excursion cars left the Main Line at Pittsfield Junction to join the Ann Arbor RR tracks that took them right to UM stadium

Self-starters got the new railroad going

Early Ypsilanti settler and entrepreneur Mark Norris was an enthusiastic supporter for the plan to bring the railroad to his town. An account of the time notes, "By hard labor $9,000 was raised in Ann Arbor, $70,000 in Detroit and amazingly enough, $100,000 at Ypsilanti. In 1947 author Alvin F. Harlow called James Kingsley and Ann Arbor the "mother and father" of the MCRR while others thought Ypsilanti had easily earned the title of "mother."

Other Ypsilanti supporters (aunts?) included **Dr. Abel Millington, 1787-1838.** Physician and Washtenaw County Sheriff; **Job Gorton**, farmer; **W.E. Perrine**, farmer; and **John Gilbert** who lived and farmed in section 31 of Washtenaw County (*as in Gilbert House, Residence, School, & Park*).

Eat Local! Depot Town's Farmers' Market

Back to you in the SPRING!

Thanks for a wonderful season

DEXTER 1839

The MCRR depot in Dexter, 1989, now houses the Huron Valley Model Railroad Club. [Charlie Whipp photo.] This depot was built in 1886 and is of wood construction.

We started modestly

MCRR's earliest depots were long, narrow, rectangular structures often with Gothic scallops or spiked fascia boards. Some boasted Italianate designs with bracketed cornices. They sat parallel to the track and served a dual role as passenger and freight buildings.

These primitive buildings had no bay windows, but oversized front window casements. Bay windows enabled views up and down the track from inside and were added to many depots after the mid-1850s.

As railroad profits increased, the company replaced the earlier depots with larger, more elaborate buildings designed to inspire confidence and pride. Ypsilanti's was one of the most ornate on the line while others boasted more somber and heavier designs.

At least 21 MCRR depots still exist and some have been farther from the tracks. Newer depots at Hammond, IN, and New Buffalo have been destroyed by arsonists.

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CHELSEA 1839

From the historical marker:

"In 1880, Chelsea was chosen by the Michigan Central Railroad for an experiment in upgrading the appearance of rural stations. Mason and Rice of Detroit were commissioned as the new station's architect. Their design was Victorian, characterized by numerous gables and gingerbread embellishments. This depot served patrons of the Michigan Central until 1975 when the company was taken over by Amtrak. In 1981, Amtrak discontinued service to Chelsea and closed the station. Fearing damage from prolonged neglect in 1985, area citizens formed the Chelsea Depot Association to restore the building. The group purchased the depot that year, and restoration began in 1986."

Everybody pitched in

-from the Edward K. Warren Foundation, Region of Three Oaks, LaPorte: Plimpton Press, 1939

An early passenger gave this account from the first year of MCRR passenger service:

"When the engineer gave a sudden frantic whistle for brakes, passengers grabbed the nearest wheel and started turning. If a passenger lost his hat, the engineer obligingly stopped the train while he ran back after it, or if a passenger wished to deliver a package . . . to some home along the route, the train would halt while this was done."

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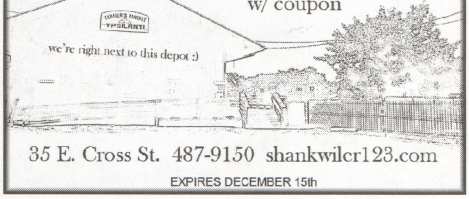

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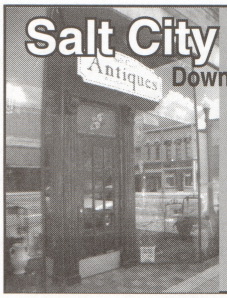

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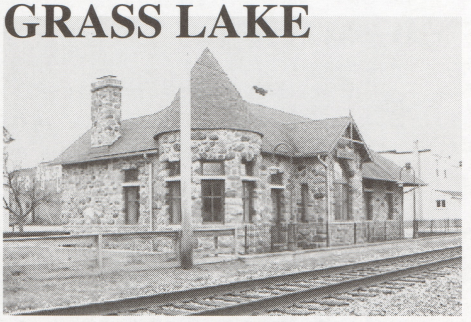
GRASS LAKE



Grass Lake's Hansel & Gretel-style depot is one of the most picturesque examples on the Main Line now used as a community center

MCRR timeline:

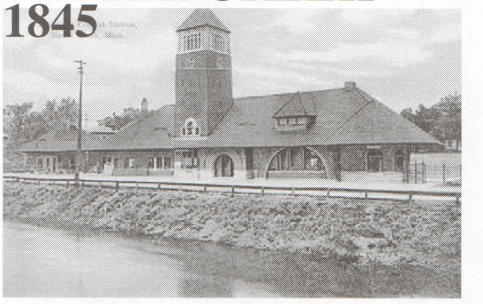
1837 First depot built at Ypsilanti
1846 MCRR buys railroad from State
1848 First track laid
1852 Track completed to Chicago
1853 MCRR leaders build Soo Locks
1856 Gross earnings over $1 million
1864 Cover of Harper's Weekly, **construction begins on Ypsi's brick depot**
1865 Lincoln funeral train
1866 President Samuel Johnson's campaign train travels entire length
1867 Pullman Palace Cars added
1870 Build Detroit River tunnel to Ontario
1871 MCRR buildings destroyed by Chicago fire
1872 Gross earnings over $5 million
1875 U.S. Fast Mail delivery via MCRR
1878 Freigthouse built at Ypsilanti
1880 Plans begin for rail service to Chicago Exposition
1887 MCRR partnership builds Mackinac Island's Grand Hotel
1889 First coaches with electric lighting
1898 New York Central in full control of MCRR
1910 Fire destroys top of Ypsilanti depot
1939 Train wreck gets lots of what's left

JACKSON 1841

From an 1872 newspaper describing Jackson's Union station, which was under construction. [Doug Leffler collection]

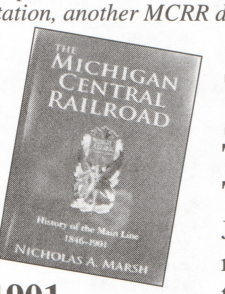
-from "A Modern Pilgrimage" published by the MCRR in 1887

BATTLE CREEK 1845



At about the same time patients were bathing in the Oriental Baths at Ypsilanti, even more seekers of good health were taking the train to Battle Creek to partake of celery potions, cereals, and regular exercise. Cereal City's gorgeous 1888 depot is now Clara's on the River, an upscale restaurant, sister to Clara's Lansing Station, another MCRR depot put to good use.

BOOK REVIEW:
The Michigan Central Railroad, History of the Main Line, 1846-1901 By Nicholas A. Marsh



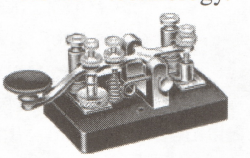
From the cover notes: "The name of Michigan's most vital railroad company has been gone from rolling stock and depots for nearly a century. It is past time to honor the railroad that rescued the state from bankruptcy and recognize its employees who endured the hard labor of bygone days to improve the lives of those who followed…"

A graduate of Eastern Michigan University himself, Marsh's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all worked on the MCRR Main Line in Washtenaw County. His book about the charter years of the MCRR is a valuable resource for anyone who waves at trains from this location.

Hard cover, 338 pages. Available in bookstores up and down the line. ISBN: 978-0-9798289-0-4, Library of Congress Control Number: 2007932419

1855
The Telegraph

Just as their tracks reached Chicago, the Michigan Central Railroad began to use telegraphy to control train operations between its depots up and down the line—the first railroad in the nation to make widespread use of the new technology.



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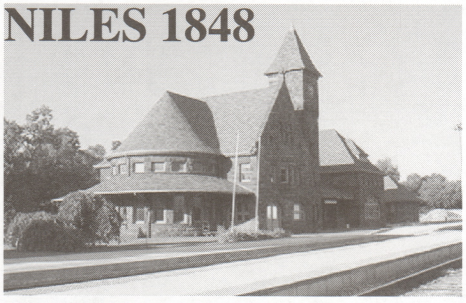
KALAMAZOO 1846

NILES 1848



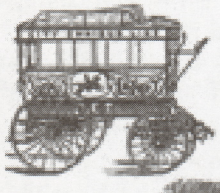
In the next *Rag*:

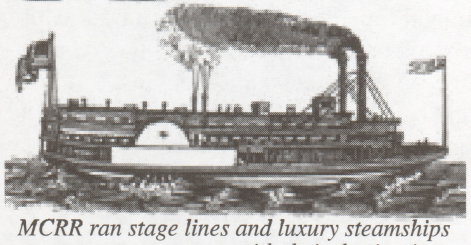
More railroadiana **PLUS** advertising and sponsorship opportunities for 2010

More than Michigan:

Tracks were in New York, Ontario, Indiana & Illinois

The MCRR track ran from Buffalo, NY, through southern Ontario crossing into Michigan again at Grosse Ile, Detroit, and Port Huron. The Main Line traversed Michigan's lower peninsula and ended for many years at St. Joseph where MCRR ferries carried rail cars and passengers across Lake Michigan to Chicago. When the line was completed across the tip of Indiana and connected to Illinois in 1852, the MCRR tracks ended 11.5 miles short of the Chicago depot and had to be pulled by the engines of other railroads.





MCRR ran stage lines and luxury steamships to connect passengers with their destinations

Tickets, please

1838: The first train from Detroit to Ypsilanti was put together by the Detroit & St. Joseph Railroad, bringing Michigan Governor Stevens T. Mason and his offical party for the grand occasion. They had a great time at the end of the new line that stretched Way Out West to Ypsilanti. Just about everyone in town turned out to welcome this exciting new technology but, on their return to Detroit, the engine broke down and the dignitaries had to walk back to Detroit from Dearborn.

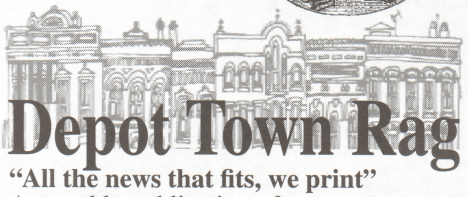
The 29-mile stretch of new tracks had used up nearly 10% of the funds available for the entire railroad. Development to the west continued and, in 1846, the Michigan Central Railroad Company bought the state-owned Central Railroad.

Ypsi's other railroad

Contrary to popular belief, not the "Huckleberry RR"

The Detroit, Hillsdale and Indiana Railroad Company came off the MCRR line at North Huron Street, a block north of Depot Town, and proceeded southwest to Pittsfield Junction, Saline, Bridgewater, Manchester, Brooklyn, Cement City, Somerset Center, Jerome, North Adams, Hillsdale, Reading, Montgomery, Ray, and thence into Indiana.

Locals called it the Huckleberry Line, implying it was so slow you could get off and pick berries and still catch up to the train. There's a "Huckleberry Party Store"—sitting near where the tracks once crossed Washtenaw Avenue—that commemorates the misnomer.



Depot Town Rag

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The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
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To the editor:
thomasdodd@comcast.net

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

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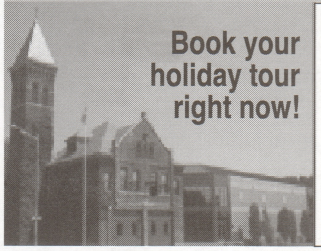

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Detroit & Ypsi started down the line

DETROIT 1838

-from a post card of the period

Anyone who finds Ypsilanti's depot depressing is probably just too sensitive to drive down Michigan Avenue to the Corktown district near what's left of Tiger Stadium to see Detroit's historic Michigan Central Railroad terminal. It'll break your heart.

The Motor City's newest depot was built in 1913 but never finished. The tallest depot in the world at the time, its upper floors were never completed.

Sold in 1956 for $5 million—one third of its original cost—the restaurant, arcade shops, and main entry closed in 1967. The depot was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.

A $1.25 million renovation opened the waiting room again from 1975 through 1978. Six years later it was sold for a transportation center project that never materialized. Once in its history, it was sold for less than $80,000.

The last Amtrak passenger train pulled out on January 6, 1988. Now it is owned by Controlled Terminals Inc. property of M.J. Moroun—who also owns the Ambassador Bridge. Suggestions to bring together all of Big D's sinful activities under one big and spectacular roof have met with little enthusiasm by City officials, but the idea of a giant casino-bordello-crackhouse has an almost Las Vegas appeal to much of today's society.

Hollywood horror films have been filmed there in recent years, including *Transformers, The Island, Noqoyqatsi,* and *Four Brothers*.

Terminal terminal

Detroit's MCRR terminal is of the Beaux-Arts Classical style of architecture, designed by the Warren & Wetmore and Reed and Stem firms who also designed New York City's Grand Central Terminal. The price tag for the original 500,000-square-foot building was $15 million.

The waiting room on the main floor was modeled after an ancient Roman bathhouse with walls of marble. The building also housed a large hall adorned with Doric columns and contained the ticket office and arcade shops. Beyond the arcade was the concourse, which had brick walls and a large copper skylight. From here, passengers would walk down a ramp to the departing train platforms, 11 tracks in all. Below the tracks is a large area for baggage, mail, and other office building functions.

The building has since been stripped of its most valuable items including brass fixtures and has been the victim of extensive vandalism and general vulgarity.

YPSILANTI 1838

A 1900 photograph of the Michigan Central depot in Ypsilanti, by the Detroit Publishing Company. [Library of Congress Collection]

Ypsilanti's first depot, built around 1838, was a simple wood frame structure that sat south of the tracks in the vicinity of the present freighthouse. The structure was removed to make way for a new three-story brick structure which was completed in 1860. Part of that depot still stands as an addition to the house on N. River at Babbit Street. The other half was moved nearby to be used as a home and destoyed in the cyclone of 1893.

In 1910, a disastrous fire swept through Ypsi's new depot, destroying the entire third story which provided living quarters for the station agent and his family. Later that year, the depot was rebuilt into a one and 1/2 story configuration.

Tragedy struck once again on August 10, 1939 when a westbound Michigan Central freight train derailed, causing further damage to the structure and yet another rebuilding. In the process, the depot lost its tower and baggage room vestibule, resulting in a rather spartan-appearing trackside facade.

All aboard!

a special excursion train beginning in Detroit, MI, west-bound for Chicago, IL, following the development of the Michigan Central Railroad with a short stop in Ypsilanti's charming depot district

Special thanks to RRHX http://www.michiganrailroads.com/RRHX/RRHXHome.html a Website hosted by MichiganRailroads.com for background, photos, and facts.

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Review the MCRR depots from Detroit to Chicago

CHICAGO 1855

Chicago's Dearborn Station has been converted to office space but you can still catch a train to Hollywood, CA, from Union Station

It took seventeen years for rail lines to reach from Detroit to Chicago. And then there was The Fire. The fires that burned everything in the three counties of Michigan's Thumb area got less attention than Chicago's that same year which destroyed the depots, freighthouses, and rail yards. But they rebuilt and eventually became somewhat larger than Depot Town.

Chi-town makes-do with Union Station today

Union Station is now a historical landmark in Chicago, the last remaining of that city's great turn-of-the-century depots. In the 1940s, over 300 trains arrived or departed daily and 100,000 passengers passed through the terminal. About 50,000 commuters now pass through Union Station each day.

The Great Hall is that portion of the station that dates back to 1925. Tourists enjoy the regal stature of this historical structure with its marble floors and walls, Corinthian columns, and bronze torches.

The Commuter: A train with no name

(from The Wabash Cannonball)

From the ivy of Ann Arbor
to the near Canadian shore
She'll roll through Ypsilanti,
like some old and tired whore
Although she's fat and pretty,
it's really quite a shame
She'll be a line of rolling stock:
the *Commuter With No Name.*

The *Orange Blossom Special,*
so the railroad people say
The *Empire Builder* and *Blue Bird*
surely had their day
The *Twilight Limited* stopped here
in sunshine or in rain
But no name has been given to
our new commuter train.

Oh, listen to the jingle,
the humor and complaint
She'll rattle past the depot,
but a legend she just ain't
She screeches to unload here,
to the district's shame
She'll stop in Ypsi's Depot Town,
that train that has no name.

Oh, here's to SEMCOG's labors,
but the name's a mystery
Can't we call it something catchy
for the sake of history?
We'll ride to the *Motor City* from A^2
whence it came
But we'll be riding on a consist
that doesn't have a name.

Great names in MCRR history

1876: The Favorite Route

1880s: The Direct Route

1883: The Dining Car Line

1890s: The Niagara Falls Line

Where's the *Motor City Daylight,*
the *Zephyr* or *The Queen*?
The *Morning Hiawatha,*
or the grand old *Wolverine*?
The *Empire Builder, Cavalier,*
the *Chicago Night Express*
They carried noble titles
as they zoomed from east to west

We loved their fancy labels;
they carried true romance
Their legends brought a legacy
that helped us sing and dance
This businessman's commuter
will drag in the bad and good
But it needs to meet tradition
to please this neighborhood.

Let's give that train a handle;
let's top her with a crown
Let's put a proper name on her
as she glides through Depot Town,
She'll stop at Metro Airport
much to the locals' shame
Then rattle off to Dee-troit,
The Commuter With No Name.

[Send your suggestions for naming the proposed 2010 commuter train to the editor: thomasdodd@comcast.net]

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